

## **Lesson Plan:**

### **Islam in the United States: Hate Crimes and Hope**

#### Objective:

Students will learn some basic information about Muslims in America through a short lecture, an interview, and a reading, understand both hate crimes and possibilities for hope, and state several things they have learned and formulate questions to learn more.

#### Context:

This lesson responds to the need, particularly after the events of September 11, to understand Islam in the United States.

Materials: Interview/role play. Handout from Diana Eck's book, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" has become the world's most religiously diverse nation*.

#### Procedure:

Instructional Set: Read aloud to students excerpt from email sent the Monday after September 11 to state employees in Frankfort, Kentucky asking them to boycott the Pizza Inn owned by Iranian-Americans.

*. . . on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, the operators of the restaurant were clapping and cheering while watching on tv in the back room, the replay of the planes crashing into our buildings. If you haven't noticed, the operators are of Islamic decent (sic). . .*

*How dare they come here from another country, live here, operate a business here, support terrorism against us (their customers) and expect us to ever again walk through their doors and support their business, which in turn supports their livelihood (sic). Hey folks, we need to send a message that they can't have it both ways, they cannot come here and take our money and also support an intentional and malicious act against all of us as Americans and all of humanity.*

Ask students what the email illustrates. Explain that the email was untrue and was attacking people on the basis of their religion and national origin. Explain that government officials quickly denounced it, and that in the next few days many state employees, and the governor of the state, went to the restaurant for lunch to be supportive of the Iranian-American owners.

Ask students to define a hate crime. (You may use the definition in the House Bill 74 on hate crimes, found in [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov): violence based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or disability of the victim.) Ask students to give examples of hate crimes against Muslims or people of Middle Eastern background that have occurred since September 11, either locally or in other states. The Council on American Islamic

Relations (CAIR) had received information about 800 incidents in the month after September 11 and the Department of Justice 153 reports. (In Lexington, Kentucky, several bricks were thrown through the local Islamic Center and four international students at the University of Kentucky were attacked in separate incidents. All the incidents were denounced by the university administration and the local news media.)

### Transition:

An October 2001 poll showed that 65% of Americans were unfamiliar with Islam and 66% were worried about conflict with Islam. This lesson offers three ways to learn more about Islam in the United States: a brief lecture with information about Islam from Diana Eck's new book, *A New Religious America, How A "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*; an interview with an American Muslim in Frankfort, Kentucky after the September 11 events; and an excerpt from Eck's book about a mosque and a Methodist Church building side-by-side in Fremont, California. At the end of the lesson, students will be asked to list two new things they have learned and write one question.

### Learning about Muslims in the United States:

Share the following information, from Eck's *A New Religious America*, on the chalk or dry erase board or on an overhead transparency.

The huge, white dome of a mosque with its minarets rises from the cornfields just outside Toledo, Ohio. There are 1400 mosques in the United States.

There are more Muslim Americans than Episcopalians, more Muslims than members of the Presbyterian Church USA, and as many Muslims as there are Jews – about six million.

On June 25, 1991, a Muslim imam stood in the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives and offered a brief prayer as the chaplain of the day. It was the first time in American history a Muslim had done so. He was Siraj Wahaj, an African-American Muslim leader from Brooklyn, New York. He prayed:

*In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, Praise belongs to Thee alone; O God, Lord and Creator of all the worlds. Praise belongs to Thee Who shaped us and colored us in the wombs of our mothers, colored us black and white, brown, red, and yellow. Praise belongs to Thee who created us from males and females and made us into nations and tribes that we may know each other.*

African-American Islam constitutes from 25 to 40% of Muslims in America with Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam a small minority and most others following W. D. Mohammed.

Islam is the most misunderstood of America's religious traditions, though it is theologically and historically closer to Christianity and Judaism than Hinduism or Buddhism.

The Islamic Society of North America has its headquarters in Plainfield, Indiana; it grew out of the Muslim Student Association organized in the 1960's by international students from South Asia and the Middle East.

## Learning from an American Muslim in Kentucky

The following is shortened from a longer interview with Alauddin A. Alauddin in *The State Journal* newspaper in Frankfort, the capital of Kentucky, on October 7, 2001. It could be presented in class as an interview, with one student acting as staff writer Charles Pearl and one acting as Alauddin.

Pearl: Please give us some biographical information on yourself. Where were you born and educated and when did you move to the United States?

Alauddin: My parents are originally from India but I spent a significant part of my life in the Middle East in Kuwait. I've been in the United States since 1992. My wife and I both went to graduate school at Louisiana Tech University and we both graduated with master's degrees – mine in civil engineering and hers in chemistry. We then moved to Frankfort and have been here about seven years.

Pearl: What is your job?

Alauddin: I'm presently branch manager for the Kentucky Division of Air Quality's Permit Review Branch. My branch reviews permit applications for any type of construction or operation of a facility that would have an impact on Kentucky's air quality. This was supposed to be a one-year stop in Frankfort. But we found Frankfort to be a nice, small, friendly town, and I had the opportunity of working in a field that I've always been attached to. I also worked with some of the most competent and dedicated people in the environmental protection field that contributes to human health. And so, when you have a good place to live and raise your children combined with a job that you actually look forward to going to, it's kind of hard to leave.

Pearl: How many Muslims are in the Frankfort area?

Alauddin: I would say about 25 to 30 Muslim households.

Pearl: How many Muslims are in Kentucky and the United States?

Alauddin: I would estimate a few thousand in Kentucky. In the United States, there is estimated to be about 6 million Muslims.

Pearl: Have you spent a lot of time watching and listening to news programs since the September 11 terrorist attacks?

Alauddin: I was in Austin, Texas at a meeting on behalf of the state when this occurred. Once that happened I think the meeting lost its meaning. So I spent a lot of time in my hotel room tv for the first couple of days, and also trying to find way to get back home. Once I got back home, there was the bigger question of helping our children, especially my son, deal with what had happened. We watched some TV together. We explained a few things, but after that we pretty much turned off the TV.

For me, as soon as that second crash occurred, I was suddenly going from curiosity to fear. I feared for what happened. I feared for my family right away. The first thought was: oh, my God, this is horrible. The second thought was: oh, God let this not be the work of anybody related to Islam or Muslims. And I have read that that was the same thought that came to NBA basketball player Hakeem Olajuwon. And then, of course, there was concern for my family. One of the first things I did was to call a friend here in Frankfort and asked him to go by my home and

pick up my wife and children so that they would not be alone. When our flights kept getting canceled day after day, a colleague from Ohio, Tom Winston, took the initiative and went across the street to a car dealership and picked out a car. He charged it to his credit card and invited us to drive back with him. And if there is a silver lining, and I look for as many as I can in this case, both he and Jon Maybriars, my other colleague from Kentucky, are now among my closet friends because we shared some pretty gut-wrenching times.

Pearl: What do you think will be the most significant impact in the lives of Muslim people in the wake of the attacks?

Alauddin: I think there are two. One was the immediate impact. And the other is the long-range impact. The immediate impact was grief. And it's so unfair because the whole nation was grieving at that time, and so was I, and I would say so were Muslims in this country. But apart from being allowed to just grieve for what had happened, Muslims also had other things to worry about. We had to worry about the security for ourselves and our family because we had seen a backlash against Muslims after the Oklahoma tragedy.

The other thing that was huge for us was having to explain it to our children. Children who were born in this country and were being raised not simply as Muslims but American Muslims. It was personally very difficult for me to explain this to my son. I remember explaining to him once why he could not pull a blade of grass from the ground in the park, saying that since he was a Muslim, he had to respect all forms of life including this blade of grass that was alive. And it was funny, he immediately came back to me and said, "Well, what do you do when you mow the lawn?" And I laughed and said, "No, you're not really taking a life then, you're basically giving the grass a haircut." To raise a child along these standards and then hear him ask the question in the wake of this tragedy, "Did Muslims do this?" – the answer to that question is very hard. My answer to him was, "Son, there are good people in this world and there are bad people. And both good and bad people may profess or associate themselves with different faiths, be it Islam or Christianity or any other faith." I said the people who did this were very, very bad people, and they deserve to be caught and punished, regardless of what faith they think they belong to. And I said as far as being Muslims, you could not be Muslim and do anything that would harm the innocent. Because regardless of whether they would be caught by the police here, God would certainly hold them accountable.

Regarding the more long-term impact in the life of Muslims, I'm reminded of a statement made by a spokesman for the Council of American Islamic Relations. He said everything that Muslims in America have worked so hard for over the past years was suddenly taken away in one day. The early Muslims simply blended in at the expense of their faith and identity. The effort over the past few years has been for Muslims to find their place in this society. To be a contributing, law-abiding member of this society, while maintaining their identity as practicing Muslims. The effort was for society to get used to seeing a Muslim woman doctor that wears a head scarf or an engineer that happens to be a bearded Muslim. To practice the Islamic faith and yet be a part of mainstream American society and not really stand out.

Pearl: What do you feel are the big misconceptions about the Islamic faith?

Alauddin: I think one of the misconceptions about the Islamic faith is that people perceive Islam to be a distant religion that is unrelated to Christianity or Judaism. The truth is that apart from the divinity of Jesus, peace be upon him, the Islamic faith is primarily a continuation of Judaeo-Christian teachings. The other thing is that people tend to look at individual countries or cultures and see certain practices and say, oh, that's Islam. We need to remember that this happens both ways. If you were sitting in India, or Pakistan, or a Middle Eastern country and you looked at America and you looked at the practices of a David Koresh, or if you looked at the practices of any other fringe group and said, "oh, that's Christianity," would that be fair? A lot of times what you see is what the media thinks will get your attention. When we visit India, I am surprised how much time we spend defending America. I am surprised by how many people know David Koresh but not the Rev. Billy Graham.

Pearl: What are some of the rules of your faith such as praying so many times a day, fasting?

Alauddin: The primary rule in our faith, what makes you a Muslim, is to bear witness in your heart that there is only one God. And to accept the prophecy of Muhammad, peace be upon Him, as the final prophet. We believe that his teachings and the Holy book that was revealed to Him are sort of a compilation and a consummation, if you will, of all the preachings that came before it. And so we are bound by that. Muslims are required to pray five times a day. We pray before sunrise, just before noon, just before the sun starts to set in the afternoon, right after sunset, and then a few hours after that just before you go to bed. All theology aside, I feel that if you're standing before God and baring your soul five times a day, what are the odds that you would commit a crime or do something evil in between those prayers? So the concept that I understand behind it is a sense of awareness of God throughout the whole day. Muslims fast during one month. It's called the month of Ramadan. We fast from sunrise to sunset and we abstain from eating or drinking or any intimate contact with our spouses.

Pearl: And this is for an entire month?

Alauddin: This is from sunrise to sunset for 30 days. The Muslim calendar is based on the lunar cycle and is therefore about 10 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar. So the month of Ramadan moves up about 10 days every year. Nowadays, the month of Ramadan is around mid-November to mid-December, which makes it relatively easy. It's winter and the days are very short. What do I get out of it? Well, for one thing I get empathy. A sense of what people, who actually are starving, are going through. The other thing it does for me is that it helps me build self-control. The third thing fasting does is that when you free yourself from food and drinks and other pleasures of life, it's amazing how much easier it is to feel connected to God.

After Ramadan there's the day of Zakat or charity. A Muslim is required every year to give 2.5 percent of his net worth to charity. And mind you, it is the net worth, not your annual income. The word Zakat actually means "to purify" and it is termed as the purification of your wealth. Because the Islamic society is envisioned to be a society in which people are more or less on equal economic terms.

Finally, there is the Pilgrimage to Mecca. I have been to Mecca twice but not at the time of Pilgrimage. You can go any other time and perform the same rituals, but it's not considered what's called the Hajj. That is specifically at a particular time of the year. They only allow 3 million people. But it's truly a remarkable sight. CNN lately has been doing some coverage and it's really a fascinating sight. If people want to see the real message of Islam, about true brotherhood and equality across races, all you have to see is the sight of Hajj. There you will see 3 million people, black, white, oriental, men, women, all dressed essentially in the same dress standing before God. There's a dress code. For men, it's two pieces of unstitched cloth, without any sort of adornment and without any jewelry or anything else. And so, if you were at Hajj and the king of Saudi Arabia and a homeless man from the streets of Frankfurt were there, you would not be able to tell one from the other. The entire meaning of Hajj is for you to come before God as one, and bare your soul, and seek forgiveness as you perform the rituals of the Hajj.

These are what are called the five pillars of Islam, and I have touched on all of them. The number one is the faith, one God and the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon Him. The second one is praying five times a day. The third one is giving charities, Zakat. The fourth one is fasting during the month of Ramadan. And the fifth one is performing Hajj, if you can afford it.

Pearl: What does Jihad mean?

Alauddin: Jihad means to struggle. And as a Muslim there are two types of struggles. One is the internal Jihad, that is, to struggle against yourself, to stay away from what is wrong. The second half of Jihad is to fight against oppression in your society or against someone who is trying to drive you out of your homeland. That's why you see this term commonly used in these Middle Eastern countries. These are people that feel that they are struggling against nondemocratic governments in their country and facing religious oppression. For example, did

the Afghan people consider their war against the Soviets as Jihad? Absolutely. But the distinction that needs to be made is Islam prohibits taking any life without just cause. The Prophet, peace be upon Him, when he would send a governor to a new province, he would advise him to not even destroy trees, to not harm civilians, to not even destroy the infrastructure, and to even protect places of worship. When the prophet of this religion would give such clear instructions to his people, how anyone can take something dastardly like the events of September 11 and somehow call that Jihad, or somehow call that Islamic, is really beyond my comprehension. There is absolutely no connection there at all.

Pearl: What does Islam offer which can help restore values of compassion and justice in our society?

Alauddin: I think that if we ever take away the stigma of Islam and Muslims, we will see that there is a lot that Islam has to offer to American society. Muslims do not consume alcohol at all. And probably we would be the most fervent supporters of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Muslims would be fervent supporters of initiatives to address gambling. Islamic values are in many ways similar to Christian values. So people who are trying to revive Christian values – and by that let me be clear, I'm talking about values as opposed to imposing religious practices on anybody – will find Islam and Muslims to be your strongest allies. The Islamic religion not only respects but requires the respect for parents and taking care of the elderly. Islam actually requires active upbringing of children, raising them with a value system, in addition to a secular education.

Pearl: What is special to you about the United States?

Alauddin: Having lived in India and Kuwait and having traveled to a few countries I can say that my wife and I made a conscious decision to raise our children in this country. The reason behind that is that we found three things in this country that are very important to us and I think those are the three things make America what it is. Frankly, you'll find this strange, maybe, coming from a Muslim. But I think that America is blessed by God because of these things.

The first thing we felt and we saw was equality among people. If you were an American you were an equal to every other American. Now, I'm not being naive about racism and about discrimination out there, but I'm saying constitutionally, legally, my son is no less an American than any other child growing up in our neighborhood.

The second thing is that there is freedom to be who you are. Now given, sometimes it's frustrating. People may say, well, we can friends, but only as long as you dress like me, or talk like me, or you come after work to have a drink with me. But by and large, America allows you a sense of religious and personal freedom that other countries do not allow. Therefore, once we raise our children, and we teach them what we teach them, they will still turn 18 and make up their own minds about what they believe and what they don't believe, what they practice and what they don't practice. And the America I know will allow them to do that.

The third thing is corruption. Once again I'm not being naive and saying that there is no corruption in this country. What I'm saying is that an average person like myself can still live here, earn a respectable living and raise a family without having to deal with corruption on a day-to-day basis. I think as long as these three things stay a large part of what is America, I think this will continue to be a blessed land.

### Hope – Next Door Neighbors: Muslims and Methodists

Ask students to read several pages from the last chapter of Eck's book, entitled "Bridge-building." In the ensuing discussion, ask "How do the Muslims and Methodists cooperate? What makes cooperation hard? Why is the cooperation important and worthwhile?"

Exit Slip:

Students should write down something new they learned from the lecture, interview, or reading and then write a question they would like to ask.

Dear Carol, Robin, and Toni,

This is my first draft of a lesson plan on Muslims in America. (Robin, I've talked with Carol and Toni but haven't seen you. We have talked about adding a lesson on Muslims and perhaps using it as a focal point at NCSS in DC. You are not going or ?) I know this is more than one class period. I know the interview (even shortened) is probably too long – what should I cut? I know we need to include some website and other resources. Help me please. And try some of this out, if you want to.

By the way, I'm ordering copies of the Monitor's special section about ten days ago entitled "Why Do They Hate Us?" for my students and will order some extras. It's excellent, also online at [csm.org](http://csm.org).

Peace, Angene